Summary

The love story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai has already been a very popular folk legend for the past thousand years. But, how was the story being enriched during its process of evolution? How did the episodes become more and more rational? Since the tale dates back to as early as the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317 ~ 420), does it have any modern significance?

This dissertation attempts to seek answers to the above questions, by comparing and analysing relevant sources in various forms of literary works and local Chinese gazettes, from Eastern Jin Dynasty to modern times.

Though this research is not a pioneer attempt, the author is benefited from the findings of his predecessors, and with new materials and modern scholarship, the author has managed to form a clearer picture of its evolution: the original theme of a righteous lady's being changed into a tragedy gives equal treatment of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai. In the Song Dynasty, an episode of transforming the couple into a pair of butterflies was added, bringing the story into successful fulfilment. Other than that, new findings demonstrate that the story not only spreads over all parts of China, including regions of the ethnic minorities, it has also been transmitted all over Southeastern Asian countries. Apart from this, in Europe, versions written in Russian and French also emerged. In actual fact, this story has begun to gain world recognition and is likened to being the Chinese version of the "Romeo and Juliet".

Besides, this dissertation attempts to examine and analyse the artistry of the popular tale, based on a thorough study of a novelette, titled Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai 梁山伯与祝英台, written by the renowned novelist, Zhang Hen-Shui 张恨水 (1895–1967). This may be regarded as an accumulation of all the merits of this tale in the past.

As far as the artistry of the story is concerned, practically very few articles or works have touched upon it. The author of this dissertation, with the guidance of modern literary theories, manages to make some individual evaluations. The characterization of the protagonists is distinctive. The author, Zhang Hen-Shui, manages to draw a vivid distinction between the good and the evil, and the characters, especially when Zhu Yingtai becomes
firmer and firmer in her stance for freedom of love, are quite well depicted. For symbolic
techniques, there is the use of both zoological and botanical objects, such as butterflies,
mandarin ducks and bamboos. The author has even used dreams to express his ideas,
making the episodes more suggestive. In his description of scenery, he has provided many
picturesque scenes to unfold the story, to portray the emotions and feelings, and to high-
light the character of each protagonist. The aesthetic beauty of a tragic ending is being
identified in a shocking spiritual fighting force for freedom of love and against fate which
monopolized love and marriage in the feudal period.